THE

BEING AND ATTRIBUTES

OF

GOD,

DEDUCED FROM THE WORKS OF CREATION, ETC.

Price 2s. 6d.

Dr. Burney 11
from the Author

THE BEING AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD,

DEDUCED FROM THE WORKS OF CREATION;

AND

Divine Providence asserted and defended;

BY

The Rev. THOMAS ETHERINGTON,

Of Alban-Hall, Oxford.

For of him, and to him, and through him, are all Things.
Rom. xi. 36.

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THE following pages are ſubmitted to the Public, from a ſenſe of the importance of their ſubject, and of their peculiar fitneſs at the preſent moment. Greater violence was never done to religion and humanity than we of this age have witneſſed; and every day's obſervation tends to convince us, that they who *ceaſe to fear God*, will ſoon learn *not to regard man*. The ambitious, proud, and deſperate agitators of rebellion againſt every eſtabliſhed government: the authors and abettors of maſſacre and rapine, have been the very men who openly avowed themſelves Atheiſts, and the enemies of all religion.

Since the French revolution began to aſtoniſh and to terrify mankind, impiety, which gave birth to it, has aſſumed a more daring aſpect than ſhe was ever ſeen to wear before; and her baneful effects on ſociety have been

more ſeverely felt, and generally dreaded than at any former period in the hiſtory of the world. Nurſed to maturity in the ſchools of Jacobiniſm, the monſter, hath iſſued from theſe peſtilential cells, to poiſon every comfort of life, and to inſpire a horrid deſpair in the hour of death. She hath taken a far more extenſive and deſolating range than ever (one would ſuppoſe) her moſt enthuſiaſtic votaries could expect or hope for, notwithſtanding their unwearied diligence, to give her currency and reputation. But it is not altogether ſurpriſing, that a deluſion, flattering the vice and folly, and according with the views and wiſhes of the ignorant and wicked, ſhould eaſily find proſelytes, in the preſent relaxed ſtate of the morals of the world, and gain a reception, which ſhall render it almoſt irreſiſtible.

To this popular deluſion is to be aſcribed the ſucceſs of the arms of France, and the rapid extenſion of that diſorganizing ſyſtem which they have purſued, and which has within theſe laſt ten years ſo grie-

vouſly oppreſſed all the nations of Europe, and will continue to oppreſs them unleſs thoſe falſe and pernicious doctrines, which have been inſtilled into the minds of the leaſt diſcerning part of mankind, are rooted out, and their place poſſeſſed by better principles, and juſter notions of things. To effect this, what better method can be taken than to enforce on the minds and conſciences of men, in a plain and popular manner, thoſe great and fundamental truths of religion, the *Being of God, a divine ſuperintending Providence, and a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments?* In attempting this important work, the Author thinks that he may ſafely rely on the indulgence of a candid public.

THE BEING AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD,

DEDUCED FROM THE WORKS OF CREATION, ETC.

IT has been the opinion of mankind, in all ages, that the affairs of this world are ſubject to the inſpection and control of an inviſible Being*. Reaſon, unaſſiſted by divine Revelation, if there ever was ſuch a thing, ſeems to have diſcovered, that as man could at no time place himſelf here, ſo neither are all the circumſtances of his condition, in his own power to chuſe or reject at pleaſure, but he ſuffers many things which he cannot poſſibly avoid, and has others to enjoy which are manifeſtly not his own procuring. In-

* ὑπερ ἐν νηὶ κυβερνήτης, ἐν χορῳ δὲ κορυφαῖος, ἐν πολει δὲ νόμος, ἐν ϛρατοπεδῳ δὲ ηγεμὼν τυτο Θεος εν κόσμῳ.

Ariſtot. lib. de Mundo.

fluenced by ſuch ſentiments as theſe, which ſeem to have their foundation deep in human nature, the heathen were continually forming to themſelves objects of divine adoration, which they ſuppoſed were either mediately or immediately the authors and diſpenſers of good and evil to mankind. Sacrifices (even human victims) were frequently offered on their altars, and it was but ſeldom that any buſineſs of importance was undertaken, without firſt endeavouring, by oblations, to appeaſe the wrath, or conciliate the favor, of thoſe deities, on whoſe approbation or diſpleaſure, men concluded, that all their happineſs or miſery—their proſperity or adverſity, depended.

Thus, if ancient and general uſage be allowed to give weight and importance to human concerns, Religion, on the ſcore of theſe, is the weightieſt and moſt important thing imaginable; it is coeval with the human race; and no nation has been found ſo barbarous as not to entertain its rites and ceremonies. Theſe were, however, oftentimes ridiculous, abſurd, and even cruel;

for the light of Nature being inſufficient to conduct men aright in religious matters, and divine Revelation being almoſt loſt to the world, through the depravity and conſequent neglect of thoſe to whom the Oracles of God were at the firſt committed, the errors of Paganiſm nearly overſpread the whole earth. For many ages, the heathen ſeem, as it were, to have been groping after God, as thoſe who are blind feel for any thing they have loſt, and were fancying they had found him, or ſome reſemblance of him, in ſtocks and in ſtones; in the hoſt of heaven; in the ſun, or in the moon, or in the ſtars. In this deplorable condition, as to divine knowledge, continued, during a long time, by far the greateſt part of mankind. Some indeed, in thoſe places, where learning and the arts flouriſhed, acquired many juſt conceptions of God, and ſeemed able to trace him (yet very imperfectly, and with doubtful ſteps) in the ways of his Providence*. Phi-

* Quid poteſt eſſe tam apertum, tamque perſpicuum cum cœlum ſuſpeximus, cœleſtiaque contemplati ſumus, quam aliquod eſſe numen præſtantiſſimæ mentis quo hæc regantur?

Tull. de natura deorum.

loſophers, though differing widely in their opinions of the Supreme Being, acknowledged an eternal mind, which inſpected and ordered the affairs of this lower world—which approved of virtue, and diſapproved of vice—which was the benefactor and preſerver of all men, but eſpecially of the wiſe and good.

Thus, in a few things, they and we agree; yet whilſt we admire their ſucceſs, and praiſe their diligence, in endeavouring to find out God, to underſtand the methods of divine Providence, and to inſtruct mankind in theſe, their higheſt intereſts, we cannot help ſeeing how perplexed they were in their enquiries; how divided in their opinions; how error mingled itſelf with truth in all their doctrines, and how utterly unable they were, after the moſt laborious and weariſome purſuits in ſearch of true wiſdom, to arrive at any thing like certainty, on divers weighty and important ſubjects. They neither ſpeak firmly, nor, at at all times conſiſtently (not even with themſelves) of the firſt cauſe of all things, of divine Providence, of the origin of evil, nor

of a future life. On ſuch points they were too full of perplexities, of doubts and fears, to benefit themſelves or others much by their opinions, which could never riſe higher than conjecture; and it was only among the Jews, (for a long time, a ſmall and obſcure nation,) that the knowledge of theſe things either exiſted, or was preſerved pure. Among them only, were theſe doctrines conſtantly taught, and enforced with an authority more than human. The deſcendants of Abraham were choſen, for many reaſons, which it would be eaſy to point out, to be the conſervators of divine knowledge in the world, and to be the people by whom God would convey his greateſt bleſſings to mankind. It was in vain therefore, that they oftentimes rebelled againſt the Almighty, ſaying, "we will be as "the heathen, as the families of the countries, "to ſerve wood and ſtone (Ezek. xx) for with "a mighty hand, and an outſtretched arm, and "with fury poured out, did God rule over "them, gathering them out of the countries "wherein they were ſcattered," and would not

ſuffer his holy name to be forgotten in the earth, nor his gracious promiſes to fail the children of men. By many miracles—by ſigns and wonders—by ſore judgments, and tender mercies, he manifeſted his power in the midſt of them, and left not the leaſt doubt in their minds of his exiſtence, and of the part he took in all their affairs.

Theſe notices of God, and of divine Providence, which we find thus very common, and wonderfully powerful among the Jews, are enlarged and confirmed to us Chriſtians. Our bleſſed Saviour has more fully and perfectly explained the divine nature and the human, and ſhewn the relation ſubſiſting between the Creator and the creature in a clearer and more ſatisfactory point of view. He has taught us that God is our Father, our Redeemer, and our Sanctifier; that his providential goodneſs extends, not to the Jews only (as they would have us think) but to the whole family of mankind—nay, even to the ſparrow and the lily of the field. What the wiſeſt of the heathen only gueſſed at, what

was in ſome inſtances but obſcurely revealed to the Jew, is proved to the Chriſtian by every teſtimony that heaven and earth can give. By the miraculous conception of Jeſus; by the ſupernatural appearances at his birth; by his doctrine and miracles; by his life and death; by his reſurrection and aſcenſion, "*life and immortality are brought to light*;" (2 Tim. i. 10.) and ſo ſure a foundation are the holy Scriptures, whereupon to build our faith, and hope, that nothing can move the true Believer from his ſtedfaſtneſs in the Goſpel—" neither perſecution, nor peril, " nor ſword, but in all things he is more than " conqueror, through Chriſt who loveth " him." (Rom. viii. 37.)

But ſince there are ſome pretenders to philoſophy, "*falſely ſo called*," who object to the authority of the inſpired writers, and deny the truth of their divine doctrine, we will, for the ſake of ſuch perſons, attend chiefly to thoſe arguments which may be drawn from reaſon and nature (the idols they profeſs only to wor-

ſhip) whilſt we prove by a method thus accommodated to their prejudices, *the Being of* GOD, *and a divine, ſuperintending* PROVIDENCE.

Firſt then, there is a Supreme Being, who created, who preſerves, and who governs the world, and all the things which it contains.

If we can ſucceed in ſhewing the folly and abſurdity of ſuch doctrines as pretend to account for the works of creation, otherwiſe than the writings of Moſes account for them, I think we ſhall in a good meaſure, have eſtabliſhed our propoſition.

Let us then impartially examine and weigh what has been ſaid, at different times, on this moſt important ſubject—moſt important, becauſe, without a firm perſuaſion and belief in God and his Providence, by which he preſerves the world, and takes account of every thing that is done in it, there can be no true Religion, no comfort in Religion, nor

any ſure foundation for virtue: "He that "cometh unto God, muſt believe that he "is, and that he is a rewarder of them that "diligently ſeek him." (Heb. xi. 6.)

It was the opinion of Ariſtotle that the world was from eternity. He tells us, that the philoſophers before his time thought differently, and that he was the firſt who held this doctrine.

In juſtice to Ariſtotle, it is obſerved, that he was not an Atheiſt*, "but "ſeems to have thought the world an eternal "effect, flowing from the energy of the di-"vine nature," (vide Doddridge on Pneumatology, Ethics, and Divinity, Prop. 21. Scho. 4.)

As every cauſe muſt be preexiſtent to any effect it produces, and nothing can be preexiſtent to that which is eternal, an *eternal effect* ſeems to be a glaring abſurdity. But

* See note page 1.

to affirm, that the ſyſtem of the univerſe had neither author, nor beginning, is much the ſame, as to ſay that St. Paul's Cathedral, or Weſtminſter Abbey, always ſtood, where they now are; that they were never deſigned by any human creature, nor erected by any human means. It is to ſay, of an effect which diſplays at once the utmoſt wiſdom, power, and goodneſs, that it had no intelligent and deſigning cauſe, which is plainly a thing abſurd. When we ſee a curious piece of mechaniſm, nay, even a chair or a table, we are more rational, and never affect to think even for a moment, that they are not the workmanſhip of man, although we happen neither to ſee nor know the mechanic that faſhioned them; and if we cannot, with any appearance of reaſon, admit the ſimpleſt effect to have been produced without ſome adequate cauſe, why imagine that the univerſe, which is ſo grand, ſo excellent, and beautiful an edifice, never employed the wiſdom and ingenuity of an inconceivably great and powerful architect? Such a thought had probably never entered into the mind of any man,—it would certain-

ly never have found entertainment there, but that a conſciouſneſs of guilt, and the dread of future puniſhment, conſtantly preying on the boſom of the wicked, may, by degrees, have inclined ſome, impiouſly, and fooliſhly to believe, what they have often and anxiouſly wiſhed, and thought their intereſt to be true, viz. that there is no God, i. e. no judge of human actions, to reward the good and puniſh the bad.

But further:

The whole frame of nature is in motion. Now motion is not eſſential to matter, but accidental only. Whatever momentum and velocity matter may at any time obtain, it manifeſtly derives them, either from a foreign impulſe, or from the commixture of certain heterogeneous ſubſtances; and we learn from every day's obſervation and experience, that matter thus put in motion, ſoons returns to its former ſtate of inactivity. Now, what power, ſhort of omnipotence, could poſſibly give to the planets that amazing velocity, with which they move round

each other, and round the ſun, and preſerve it to them undiminiſhed for the ſpace of ſix thouſand years? The motion of theſe huge maſſes of matter, can have been produced only by the impulſe of a Being, inconceiveably great, and powerful; and conſidering the benefits we conſtantly derive from this motion, we muſt be convinced in our minds, that its author is infinitely wiſe and good. But from what cauſe ſoever, theſe vaſt bodies firſt obtained their motion and direction, is it poſſible for a rational man to believe, that they could of themſelves have moved with the ſame velocity from eternity, or even for ſix thouſand years, when he obſerves, that a few *minutes*, nay even *ſeconds*, will terminate the progreſs of a ball, emitted from the mouth of a cannon? It is fair to conclude then, that this motion could proceed from none elſe than the *Almighty*, and that its preſervation is one of the many beneficial effects of his good *Providence*.

Should it be objected, that bodies here put in motion, on, or near the ſurface of this

earth, are ſo vaſtly diſproportioned to the planets, that we cannot reaſon with certainty from the one to the other: that in projectiles, attraction, gravity, and the reſiſtance of ſo denſe a medium as is the atmoſphere, are the great impediments of motion, and if theſe were removed, the progreſſion of a ball from the mouth of a cannon, would be perpetual; we anſwer, in the firſt place, that though a large and heavy body, will, in the ſame medium, and moving with equal velocity proceed farther, and continue to move longer than a ſmall and light one, yet whatever difference in quality and diſproportion in point of quantity, may exiſt between ſuch bodies, their diſtances and times will bear a certain proportion to each other; and in the next place, we anſwer, that except in a perfect vacuum, and a ſtate of intire freedom, from all attraction, there can be no perpetual motion, without the impulſe of an eternal and almighty agent.

Now the earth does not move in a vacuum, and is ſubject to attraction from the other planets, and to the preſſure (as it is ſuppoſed) of the

centripetal and the centrifugal forces; therefore if theſe things do exiſt, and are the great impediments of motion, as we doubt not that they are, the heavenly bodies cannot have moved from eternity; becauſe their velocity, gradually decreaſing, muſt have come to an end, and the whole diſpoſition of the ſyſtem muſt, long before this time have been deſtroyed. Moreover, the cannon ball, or any other body in projectiles, being put in motion, is ſuppoſed, in a vacuum, and free from gravitation, to proceed for ever in a *right line*. The caſe is therefore ſimply reduced to this: if the earth or any other planet move *not* in a vacuum, the reſiſtance of the medium, however ſmall it be, would *alone*, without thoſe powerful impediments of motion, attraction and gravitation, by continually oppoſing its velocity, in time deſtroy it; therefore the world cannot have exiſted from eternity: and if it move *in* a vacuum, and be not attracted, nor feel the preſſure of the centripetal and the centrifugal forces, its natural direction is in a right line; which, however, we know from obſervation and experience, is

certainly not the caſe with any of the planets, but that their progreſſion is circular; and that the earth makes a compleat revolution round the ſun, at the amazing diſtance of eighty-one millions of miles in three hundred and ſixty-five days, ſix hours, and forty-nine minutes, and moves, at the ſame time round its own axis once in every twenty-four hours. It is neceſſary then to aſſign ſome cauſe for this unnatural motion and direction of theſe huge bodies, and that cauſe can be none other than God himſelf, the great Maker and mover of all things. When he, with infinite wiſdom, power, and goodneſs, firſt projected the heavens and the earth, he deſigned the latter to be a fit habitation for man and beaſt, and accordingly preſcribed to the earth its proper offices and courſes, wiſely and graciouſly fitting theſe for the ends he propoſed. Thus he either gave, by his almighty arm, ſuch an impulſe at firſt, to the planets, as ſhould ſerve them until time ſhall be no more, or elſe he impels them ſtill, by a conſtant miracle.

Again, in tracing the origin of nations, we find they proceeded from the eaſt, where

man was firſt created, towards the weſt; and that they had but very ſmall beginnings. The noted increaſe of population: the rude ſtate of many nations ſome centuries ago: the imperfect knowledge of arts and ſciences, of agriculture and commerce; and the gradual advancement that has been made towards civilization, intirely diſcredit the authority of Ariſtotle, and take away all credibility from his doctrine. It is not probable that ſo many tokens of an infant world could have been diſcovered, as are noticed by thoſe who have ſearched into antiquity, had this been the habitation of men from eternity; or that the arts of poliſhed life would not have been brought to great perfection, even long before we have any account of men in a ſtate of civil ſociety. From the uſual progreſs of human inventions and improvements, and the care and attention which are beſtowed on thoſe things, whereon the ſecurity, the conveniency and comfort of mankind, in a great meaſure, depend, we are led to conclude, that many uſeful diſcoveries would not have remained

intirely unknown, and others, but very little underſtood and imperfectly practiſed, until a recent period, had this world and its inhabitants never had a beginning. I ſhall therefore diſmiſs this opinion of the world's eternal duration, after remarking that a notion of its having been produced from an original chaos, has been found among barbarous as well as civilized nations, and that the moſt critical enquirers into its age have agreed that all circumſtances conſidered, it does not appear to be older than the Moſaic hiſtory makes it, which is about 6000 years, and therefore independent of the ſtrong evidences of Moſes being an inſpired writer, we ſhould embrace his account as true, ſince no better, nor any other ſo good, can be found.

Other philoſophers, at the head of whom were Epicurus and Democritus, have maintained that the world had a beginning, but was formed by chance, by a fortuitous concourſe of atoms, which were from eternity floating in the vaſt immenſity of ſpace.

This doctrine does not completely ſerve the Atheiſt, unleſs it be affirmed, that not only the heavens and the earth were produced by chance, but alſo the different ſpecies of animals, whether they inhabit the earth, fly in the air, or ſwim in the ſea: that by an accidental concurrence of atoms, or ſmall particles of matter, their organized bodies were produced, which obtained of neceſſity life and motion; and that the different natures, faculties, and capacities of animals, proceed from the difference of their form and conſtruction. Atheiſm muſt ſuppoſe that matter, which neither in the largeſt maſs nor in the ſmalleſt particle, has either ſenſation or motion neceſſarily belonging to it, exiſted only from eternity, and that by combination it may produce all the phænomena of the creation, animate and inanimate, intellectual and corporeal; and what is more ſurpriſing, that this combination was the effect of chance.

Atheiſtical materialiſts ſtrengthen themſelves in this opinion, by obſerving, that the

animal functions are deſtroyed, when the organization of the body is, by age or otherwiſe, materially injured, and conclude, that as the integrity of certain organs of the body is neceſſary to animal life, animal life is the neceſſary conſequence of a perfect organization.

It is not worth the while to controvert this opinion, becauſe it is eaſy to ſhew that chance can never have had any ſhare in the production of the univerſe, nor in the organization of our bodies. It is, however, much eaſier to believe, and far more natural to think that *ſpirit*, which, even in its feebleſt ſtate has an evident ſuperiority and dominion over *matter*, and in inſtances of higher perfection can move, and change, and alter and modify it in ten thouſand different ways, proceeded not from matter; but that matter, as an inferior exiſtence, devoid of all thought and intention, of ſenſation, and ſpontaneous motion, was produced by the *eternal mind*, for ſome great and important purpoſe—to ſerve to all

the ends of creation—for cloathing of ſpirit, and thus giving form and ſubſtance to various creatures, to the end that God might render his glory and power viſible, and receive adoration and praiſe from angels and men. And it is very unlikely, that ſenſeleſs matter, by mere chance, ſhould produce the life and motion, the inſtinct and reaſon of the animal creation, when all the art and ingenuity of man have never been able to produce the ſmalleſt inſect, by compounding mere lifeleſs matter*.

* Si quid eſt quod efficiat ea quæ homo licet ratione præditus, facere non poſſet, id profecto eſt majus, et fortius et ſapientius homine.

What Pope ſays in the following lines is not ſtrictly and phyſically true:

> See thro' this air, this ocean, and this earth,
> *All matter quick*, and burſting into birth.
>
> ESSAY ON MAN. Epis. I. v. 233.

As a piece of poetical imagery, it very forcibly repreſents to the imagination, that infinite variety of animalculæ, with which Nature abounds, and which are the ſecret cauſe of an almoſt endleſs generation of inſects, &c. but it is not true of matter as ſuch: it is not true with regard to the table before me, nor the paper I am writing on, nor the pen I am

But an inconceiveable number of difficulties crowd in upon the mind, on hearing it affirmed that the world and its inhabitants,

writing with, &c. &c. Thomſon, in his Seaſons, is more correct on this ſublime ſubject.

" Full Nature ſwarms with life; one wond'rous maſs
Of animals, or atoms organiz'd,
Waiting the *vital Breath*, when parent heaven
Shall bid his *ſpirit blow*. The hoary fen,
In putrid ſteams, emits the living cloud
Of peſtilence. Thro' ſubterranean cells,
Where ſearching ſun-beams ſcarce can find a way,
Earth animated heaves. The flowery leaf
Wants not its ſoft inhabitants. Secure,
Within its winding citadel, the ſtone
Holds multitudes. But chief the foreſt boughs,
That dance unnumber'd to the playful breeze,
The downy orchard, and the melting pulp
Of mellow fruit, the nameleſs nations feed
Of evaneſcent inſects. Where the pool
Stands mantled o'er with green, inviſible,
Amid the floating verdure millions ſtray.
Each liquid too, whether it pierces, ſooths,
Inflames, refreſhes, or exalts the taſte,
With various forms abounds. Nor is the ſtream
Of pureſt cryſtal, nor the lucid air,
Tho' one tranſparent vacancy it ſeems,
Void of their unſeen people. Theſe, concealed
By the kind art of forming heaven, eſcape
The groſſer eye of man: for, if the worlds

were, at any time, produced by chance. The admirable beauty, the wonderful contrivance, the uſes which are ſerved, and the ends that are anſwered, ſufficiently prove the ſyſtem of nature not to be the effect of chance, but of wiſdom and power, of deſign and goodneſs. From chance we know that nothing but diſorder and confuſion can ariſe; but in the machinery of the univerſe all is order and harmony, beauty and uſefulneſs, and therefore, with good reaſon, we ſuppoſe it to be the workmanſhip of a powerful, deſigning, intelligent, and good Being*. An ill-ſhapen maſs, deſtitute of every thing that looks like deſign, or ſhews a view to any end, is all that can reaſonably be expected from chance, and not a Globe like this, which we

> In worlds inclos'd ſhould on his ſenſes burſt,
> From cates ambroſial, and the nectar'd bowl,
> He would abhorrent turn; and in dead night,
> When ſilence ſleeps o'er all, be ſtunn'd with noiſe."
>
> THOMSON's Seaſons. Summer.

* Eſſe præſtantem aliquam, æternamque naturam et eam ſuſpiciendam adorandamque hominum generi, pulchritudo mundi ordoque rerum cæleſtium cogit confiteri.

Tull. de Divinatione.

inhabit, furniſhed with whatever can pleaſe the fancy, or delight the eye; and fitted by the moſt wonderful ſkill and contrivance, for the ſupport and comfort of an infinite variety of creatures. Every thing appertaining to it contributes to the benefit or pleaſure of all its inhabitants; is either neceſſary to ſuſtain life, or conducive to its health and comfort. Its relation to the whole ſyſtem of the univerſe, particularly the ſun and moon, from which it receives light and heat: its rapid annual motion, by which we obtain the ſeaſons and their various produce: its diurnal motion, which cauſes alternate day and night to all the world, ſo neceſſary for man and beaſt, the day for labour, the night for reſt: its vegetation, which affords ſuch plenty and variety of food, not only ſufficient to ſuſtain all its inhabitants, but to ſpare, and ſo well adapted to each particular creature's taſte and need, as to give unſpeakable delight by its different quality, taſte and flavor: its mountains and valleys; its rivers and ſprings; its mines of iron, coal, and ſtone, &c. which ſerve to ſo many neceſſary and convenient

purpoſes of life, together with an infinite variety of other particulars that might be named, demonſtrate theſe to be the work and contrivance of an omnipotent, wiſe, and good Being, who, in conſtituting and faſhioning the univerſe, hath carefully provided for the neceſſities and conveniences, the buſineſs and pleaſure, of all his percipient and intelligent creatures.

But admitting the world to have been produced at firſt by chance, and the earth thus admirably fitted for the reception of its various inhabitants, by the ſame blind deity, ſtill we have conceded nothing that we cannot very well ſpare, ſince by the creed of the atheiſt, it muſt either have been pregnant with, at leaſt, the male and female of every ſpecies of animals, which have at any time inhabited it, or have remained deſtitute of man and beaſt until this day. It muſt have ſerved at the firſt to far different uſes than it does now, and have been a kind of matrix not only for the human, but the whole brute and feathered

creation, or it had ſtill been a deſart, if we are to believe the infidel, that there is no God. It may not be uſeleſs to pauſe here for a moment, and aſk ourſelves what reaſon there is for ſuppoſing the earth ever poſſeſſed this power of ſpontaneous generation, and if it did, how it came at any time to be deprived of ſuch a virtue? Whence, at the firſt, was it thus ſtrangely impregnated, and in what order, at what time, and where, quo in loco, was this teeming Parent of every living creature delivered of her multifarious offspring? But we will proceed in expoſing the ridiculous abſurdity of this hypotheſis.

It is not ſaid whether one ſingle pair only of each kind was produced from the womb of the earth (we of courſe except the Moſaic account, as that to which our adverſaries never have recourſe, unleſs to endeavour to diſprove its authenticity) or an innumerable multitude: neither are we told whether their organized bodies were formed inſtantaneouſly,

or by a ſlow and gradual proceſs: whether they were brought to life in a ſtate of helpleſs infancy, or in the full maturity of a vigorous age. In the latter ſtate it will be ſaid; becauſe in infancy no creature can procure its own ſubſiſtence, but is beholden for nouriſhment to ſome of its own ſpecies of maturer age, without whoſe care it would periſh. The bodies therefore of one male and female of every ſpecies of animals muſt have been organized in a ſtate of mature ſtrength and vigor, capable of procuring their own food, and alſo of defending themſelves againſt the violence of any other creature that might by chance have been produced before, of equal maturity, of a fiercer nature, and of greater ſtrength. For the ſake of illuſtration: before the lion and the lamb met together in this field of exiſtence, it is altogether neceſſary to ſuppoſe, that men were in a condition not only to defend themſelves, but alſo to protect the weaker and the milder nature from the devouring fierceneſs of its natural and more powerful enemy. Now ſuch contrivance does not look like chance, and yet without ſome

rule and order of this ſort being obſerved in the production of animals, it would have been in vain that man and beaſt had ever crept from the mud of the Nile, or broken the ſhells in which they lay in embryo, as they muſt have periſhed with hunger, or have devoured one another. It is more than probable if ſuch an infinite variety of creatures, of different natures, tempers and intereſts had been brought forth promiſcuouſly, and without the providential care of a ſuperior Being providing food for their ſuſtenance, and otherwiſe watching for their preſervation, that the greateſt number would have periſhed in the very threſhold of their exiſtence, ſince they are all in ſome degree, and many of them totally inimical one to another, though by the ſkilful management of a wiſe and good Providence, they now remarkably promote each others benefit and pleaſure. Man, were he ſo reſolved, might perhaps exterminate the whole brute creation, but the wiſdom and goodneſs of God have made it his intereſt to cheriſh and protect ſome; his pleaſure to ſupport and maintain others; and his inclination not wantonly and

cruelly to kill or deſtroy any. But were any whole ſpecies of animals to periſh either by deſign or accident, are we to ſuppoſe that ſome blind chance or other would go to work again? that matter would acquire a new virtue, or of its own accord, aſſume a new motion and direction, and that a few ſenſeleſs atoms would begin to dance about until by ſome lucky accident they met in juſt ſuch a *ſhape*, and *form*, and *order*, as were wanting to fill up the void! This is not to be believed, and he who would affirm ſuch a thing poſſible might be juſtly eſteemed as a fool or a madman. Were one or any number of ſpecies of animals to become extinct, they would be for ever loſt; nor are there any energies in matter that can reſtore them, unleſs He ſpoke the word "who, by his Almighty power, "firſt faſhioned man of the duſt of the "ground; breathed into him the breath of "life, and made him a living ſoul." (Gen. ii. 7.)

Again: if the earth did at any time, of its own accord, produce theſe curiouſly organ-

ized bodies, which, as the Atomiſts are obliged to ſay (not admitting the divine operations) obtained of neceſſity life and motion, ſtrength and vigor, ſenſe and cunning in the higheſt perfection; whence comes it to paſs, that the ſame way of ſpontaneous generation has not continued until this day, and that chance or accident does not now preſent us with productions after this manner? It ought ſurely to ſurprize us if ſuch an infinite variety of creatures, ſo curious in the furniture, and perfect in the ſtructure of their bodies, hath, at one time or other, been thus ſtrangely produced, that we ourſelves have never ſeen or known an animal which we are ſure, or indeed have any reaſon at all to think came into exiſtence this way; neither is it affirmed by the inhabitants of any country in any age of the world, that they witneſſed ſuch a phænomenon, or knew thoſe who had. If the firſt pair for inſtance of our ſpecies were faſhioned accidentally, by a blind concourſe of atoms, how is it that the ſame thing is not happening frequently, and that neither inſtantaneous productions, nor bodies

forming, though as yet of imperfect organization, ever meet our view? Ours are not, it would ſeem the proper ſoil and climate for thus producing animals, though they may afford us many inſtances of atheiſm, infidelity, and libertiniſm.

To ſay, that the male and female of every ſpecies of animals were ſome how or other at the firſt produced by chance, though it is neither known when nor where, nor in what condition and circumſtances, but, that now there remains no need for ſuch extraordinary operations of nature, which never does any thing in vain, is a ſort of argument that would diſgrace even a ſchool-boy.

According to this declaration and conceſſion however, nature is moſt *powerful*, *wiſe*, and *good*, and muſt be poſſeſſed of the liberty of chuſing to act or not, which ſhe appears always to have exerciſed with the utmoſt judgment and diſcretion, as is manifeſt in all her works: in conſtituting and faſhioning the univerſe: in producing an infinite variety of creatures, advancing in excel-

lence by the niceſt gradation from non-exiſtence to exiſtence; from bare exiſtence to animal life; from animal life to the different degrees of inſtinct; and from inſtinct to the aſtoniſhing faculties of the rational ſoul! Nature alſo (if we muſt uſe this word in preference to any other) will be found, not only to have produced all theſe things, but alſo to have carefully provided for their preſervation, notwithſtanding the perpetual tendency of the greater part of her viſible works to change and periſh. By a kind of annual creation the earth is renovated in her fruits every year for the ſuſtenance of man and beaſt, and creeping thing, and fowl of the air; and by an inſtinct implanted in every animal, ſtrongly impelling it to propagate its kind and to cheriſh its offspring, the world is plentifully furniſhed with various inhabitants, though they are paſſing away in multitudes daily, and are no more ſeen. It will not be neceſſary I think to purſue this argument any further, nor need we to ſay, if NATURE *be thus powerful, wiſe and good,* NATURE *muſt be* GOD. It is nonſenſe to talk of nature doing this, or that,

or the other thing, unleſs by nature we may underſtand is either meant a ſecond cauſe *only*, or a chain of ſecond cauſes under the inſpection and control of the *great firſt cauſe*, or elſe that very ETERNAL, SELF-EXISTENT, OMNIPOTENT, ALL-WISE, AND GOOD BEING, who created all things for his glory, "*and for whoſe pleaſure they are* "*and were created.*" (Rev. iv. 11.)

If now we have ſhewn that the world and its inhabitants cannot have been from eternity, nor yet produced by chance, it follows that God created them, and that he infinitely excels all creatures, in *majeſty*, *dominion*, *wiſdom*, *power*, and *goodneſs*. That he *preſerves* and *governs* them, is no leſs certain.

To proceed then in this part of our argument.

It does not appear to human reaſon that any part of the univerſe can uphold itſelf. The whole is a ſyſtem that would fall into confuſion and periſh without the continual ſupport of that Almighty Power who firſt gave it being. It is no leſs than a conſtant

miracle, that the ſun, the great fountain of light and heat, hath been continually diſpenſing theſe benefits to ſurrounding worlds, and burning for ſix thouſand years without exhauſting its fuel—without increaſing or diminiſhing in bulk, in light, or in heat! Any one of theſe accidents befalling that glorious luminary would be deſtructive, not only to this globe and all its inhabitants, but to the whole ſolar ſyſtem—perhaps to worlds innumerable beyond it! We ourſelves could not endure a much greater degree of light; it would dazzle our eyes even to blindneſs: we cannot do well with leſs, the buſineſs of life requires at leaſt the portion we enjoy; in total darkneſs it would be intirely ſuſpended: but a very ſmall increaſe of heat we know from the teſtimony of our ſenſes would parch us with drought; and common obſervation tells us, it would render the earth unfruitful as a heap of ſand: a like barrenneſs would be the effect of intenſe cold. The preſervation therefore of this immenſe globe of fire, juſt in the ſame ſtate and circumſtances it hath

been in ever ſince its creation, to cheer univerſal nature, to enlighten, to warm, and to fructify the earth by its vivifying beams, is an effect of divine Providence we muſt be ſenſible of, although we can never ſufficiently admire it. With men it is the moſt difficult thing in nature, indeed next to an impoſſibility, to maintain by any art or care, and that but for a very ſhort time, an equal light and heat by due ſupplies of fuel: but here, in the inſtance before us, without the leaſt trouble, or apparent difficulty, or viſible expenditure of combuſtible materials, they have been maintained on a ſcale of immeaſureable magnitude for 6000 years! It would ſeem that God hath ordained the ſun to be his faithful witneſs in the heavens, to declare his Omnipotence, to publiſh his praiſes, and to magnify him in all ages and nations to the end of the world.

Again: the earth, although ſo large and ponderous a body, is ſuſpended in the air, which is ſo light and thin a ſubſtance that it will hardly for a moment bear up a feather, and the waters, which are of a mid-

dle gravity between the air and the earth, being ſpecifically heavier than the former and lighter than the latter, would, in aſſerting their proper ſtation, deluge the world, but that they are compreſſed and ſtayed by the hand of the Almighty. The weakeſt thing that can be imagined is made to bind the ſtrongeſt, and at his command whom all things obey, a rope of ſand curbs the raging of the angry ſeas, impatient of their impriſonment.

We are told indeed by our philoſophical opponents that all theſe things are very eaſily accounted for: that all the myſtery is intirely unravelled by the doctrine of gravity, and the centripetal and centrifugal forces of the planets which bind the whole ſyſtem as in a chain together. But a little obſervation will ſerve to convince us that theſe laws of nature muſt have been originally impoſed on the univerſe by the great Creator of all things, and ſanctioned by his Omnipotence; and that they moreover require ſo nice a diſtribution and juſt proportion of matter and motion

to effect and preſerve this magnetic equilibrium, by which every thing upholds, and is itſelf upheld, as cannot have been made but by infinite wiſdom and infinite power. The leaſt diminution of ſubſtance, alteration of diſtance, or error of motion in any of the large conſtituent parts of this vaſt and complicated machine, theſe philoſophers themſelves confeſs, would throw the whole into confuſion and end in total ruin! Now ſubject as the earth is to open and violent aſſaults from without; to the certain, though ſecret and ſilent underminings of fire and water within: vext as it is by continual excavations of iron, and coal, and ſtone, &c. which are oftentimes carried to very diſtant parts, and there together with whole foreſts of timber converted into ſmoke and aſhes, or into huge piles of building, may we not ſuppoſe its motion and gravity to be ſometimes ſo materially affected, as that the laws of nature would be thereby diſturbed, or without the divine interpoſition totally ſuſpended? So ſtrong, however, are theſe inviſible chains in the

hand of the Almighty, that we apprehend not the leaſt danger from any chance or accident that can happen to the ſpheres. The ſtorms alſo and tempeſts which ariſe from the jarring elements aſſail us in vain. In vain do any of them endeavour to obtain by violence, an injurious and laſting pre-eminence over the reſt. "Though the waves "of the ſea toſs themelves, yet can they "not prevail; though they roar, yet can "they not paſs over." (Jer. v. 22.) And notwithſtanding that earthquakes, thoſe dreadful convulſions of nature, ſhake the world to its very centre, and carry "*mountains into the* "*midſt of the ſea*," yet in the wreck of cities, nay even of intire provinces, we ſee no ill effect produced on the whole, but the "Moon obſerveth her appointed ſeaſons, and "the ſun knoweth his going down." (Pſ. civ. 19.) We remain ſecure under God's protecting Providence, expecting ſeed time and harveſt, ſummer and winter, nor believe that theſe bleſſings will fail the children of men, before that great and terrible day of

the Lord, " in which the heavens being on " fire, ſhall paſs away with a great noiſe, " and the elements ſhall melt with fer- " vent heat; the earth alſo, and the works " that are therein ſhall be burnt up." (2 Pet. iii. 10.)

Our ſecurity in the mean time then, can only with good reaſon be aſcribed to his immediate ſuperintendency, who in *wiſdom* and *power* hath laid the foundations of the earth ſo ſure that they ſhall not be removed at any time, and reſtrained the raging of the ſea, ſaying, " hitherto ſhalt thou come, " but no further; and here ſhall thy proud " waves be ſtayed." (Job xxxviii. 11.) When the Omnipotent arm of God ſhall be with- drawn from its ſupport, " the earth will " reel to and fro, and ſtagger like a drunk- " ard, and will be removed like a cottage, " and it will fall and not riſe again." (Iſa. xxiv. 20.)

Now if divine Providence be thus mani- feſt in conſtituting, faſhioning, and preſer-

ving, the material world, adjuſting all things by weight and meaſure, and ordering them by the moſt infallible rules of wiſdom and goodneſs, it may ſurely be ſuppoſed in the government of the rational and moral world —in its diſpenſations to mankind, to act on the ſame wiſe, benevolent, and gracious plan. Though the ways of God were more dark and intricate than we now find them, yet infinite power, infinite wiſdom, and infinite goodneſs might ſtill be relied on—might well be ſuppoſed by any reaſonable and conſiderate mind, to order all things for the beſt.

But it is ſaid, if God be thus wiſe, thus powerful, and good, and hath always been concerned for the happineſs and welfare of his creatures, why, foreknowing, as he muſt have done, the fall of our firſt parents; how that deplorable event would be effected; and the evils that would enſue, did he not place them beyond the reach of the tempter: or why did he create them at all?

It is a proof of great pride and folly to find fault with what we do not underſtand ; and unleſs it can be ſhewn that man was not endowed with ſuch powers as were neceſſary to reſiſt the temptation of the Devil, and made aware of the miſchief and danger of liſtening to his evil ſuggeſtions : and unleſs it can be ſhewn alſo, that infinite wiſdom, power, and goodneſs cannot repair the damage which hath been done, nor by any act of grace, within the competence of Heaven, more than counterbalance the evil with good, the miſery with happineſs, the diſgrace with glory ; all objections againſt the act of creation, or againſt the goodneſs and vigilance of divine Providence, on the ground of the introduction of evil into the world, will be clearly, without any ſolid foundation.

So great and good a Being as is God, could not deſtine millions of creatures ſuſceptible of pleaſure and pain in an exquiſite degree, to be for ever miſerable ; yet this would be juſtly imputable to him, had he required any thing of angels

and men, as the condition of their continuing happy, which they were by nature unable to perform. But we will proceed briefly to ſhew that the juſt and merciful God, the author of all good, could only intend his own glory and their happineſs, when he created angels and men, and that he is not, neither indeed can he be, diſappointed of his gracious aim and intention.

When God willed to diſplay his almighty power and infinite goodneſs, he created various intelligent beings, and imparted to them freely of thoſe qualities which denote his own exiſtence, and in the unbounded poſſeſſion whereof conſiſts the infinite perfection of the Divine Nature; ſuch, for inſtance, are freedom of will and liberty of action; ſuch alſo are underſtanding, and virtue, and knowledge; and ſuch are holineſs, juſtice, truth, and goodneſs. Endowed in a very eminent degree with all theſe advantages, his rational creatures were thus enabled to perceive their Creator's excellence, and to celebrate his praiſes; to admire his goodneſs, and experience his conſtant bounty; to know that they were of

divine origin, made in his own image, and after his own likeneſs. "God created man "in his own image, in the image of God created "he him, male and female created he "them." (Gen. i. 27.) But no creature, however excellent its nature, however valuable its endowments, or great and numerous its privileges, can be abſolutely free, independent, and incapable of doing any evil. Abſolute freedom, intire independence, and neceſſary goodneſs belong *ſolely*, and we may venture to ſay *incommunicably* to the Supreme Being, ſince, if any thing be impoſſible with God, it muſt be this, viz. to create a nature equal to, and in like circumſtances as his own. Whatever derives its exiſtence from another, and is conſcious that it does ſo, and with that exiſtence innumerable advantages, gratifications, and enjoyments, ſuch an exiſtence muſt neceſſarily be inferior to, and lie under the obligation of a grateful, and humble ſubmiſſion to the will of that Being, from whom all theſe things came, and on whoſe favour they all depend: that is, to the will of the ONE ETERNAL, SELF-EX-

ISTENT, INCOMPREHENSIBLE, ALL-WISE, MOST POWERFUL, JUST, AND GOOD BEING, the underived ſource of all exiſtence, from whom all thoſe perfections we meet with in any creature originally ſprung, and in whoſe eſſence all things ſubſiſt.

The Almighty Creator, the greateſt and beſt of beings, was laviſh in his bounty on man. Having beſtowed on him thoſe gifts of whoſe great excellence we can, in our preſent imperfect ſtate, but trace a very faint reſemblance, he placed him in the pleaſant garden of Eden and appointed him to dreſs and to till it. His abode was rendered delightful to him, his enjoyments were many; every thing was for his uſe, and at his diſpoſal, but the fruit of one tree. So that unleſs the firſt parents of mankind could have been made as free and independent as God himſelf is, and as incapable of doing wrong, which is a thing impoſſible, we cannot underſtand how their nature and condition could have been improved, or their miſcarriage have been rendered leſs pro-

bable. We cannot know indeed every thing that God is able to do for his creatures, neither are we perfectly acquainted with the nature and privileges of angels, but man was created only a little lower than these bright spirits*, and the happiness of both consisted in, and depended on paying an easy homage to God in token of obedience, and as a grateful acknowledgment for the many benefits which they had received at his hands. The angels, we may suppose, were less liable to err than man. That they enjoyed the presence of the Almighty in higher perfection, and had fuller communications from the divine bounty than our first parents, we have the very best authority for believing. They were admitted to a nearer and more frequent intercourse with their Maker, and so were under stronger obligations to gratitude and obedience, and must have had a delight inconceivable to us, in admiring and imitating the divine rectitude and goodness, and in rendering unto God in devout

* Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. (Ps. viii. 5.)

ſubjection, their conſtant tribute of adoration and praiſe. But ſome of them having failed in theſe points of duty, and become the forerunners and promoters of that moſt heinous crime, Rebellion againſt their ſovereign Lord and moſt gracious Creator, are juſtly reſerved in " everlaſting chains, under darkneſs, " unto the judgment of the great day." (Jude 6.) The puniſhment of theſe apoſtate ſpirits, we are taught to believe, is extreme on account of that exalted ſtate of being they were originally placed in, and which they fell from; at the ſame time aggravating their guilt and condemnation by ſeducing mankind. It was a conſideration, no doubt, with the juſt and merciful God, that the revolt of the rebellious angels from the eaſy ſervice and ſubjection their condition laid them under, was their own ſole act and deed; whereas man was beguiled, and drawn into his crime by a ſubtil ſpirit, ranking high in the ſcale of being, of a ſpecious appearance, and of an inſinuating air. Therefore man's diſobedience to the law of his Creator was not deemed

an unpardonable tranſgreſſion. When ſentence was pronounced upon him, and he was driven from the preſence of his offended Maker, it was only to do pennance for his crime, a door being opened, and a way pointed out to him whereby he might recover the favor of the Almighty, and through the gates of death enter on another life in a paradiſe of never fading bliſs. Theſe benefits and bleſſings were all contained in this gracious promiſe, which was doubtleſs fully underſtood by the firſt tranſgreſſors themſelves—" the ſeed of " the woman ſhall bruiſe the ſerpent's head." (Gen. iii. 15.) So that, although by tranſgreſſion, we are far removed from that affinity to God which the human nature enjoyed in original righteouſneſs—when our firſt parents, in innocence, converſed with him in Paradiſe—when they knew his will intuitively, and were led to obey it by a kind of inſtinct; yet we are not with the accurſed angels purſued by the divine wrath into outer darkneſs, where is " *weeping, and wail-* " *ing, and gnaſhing of teeth*"—where there is no hope, no joy, no redemption, but we

are ſtill the objects of God's love and tender compaſſion, and are retained, as it were, in the outer courts of Paradiſe, where we are permitted to contemplate with holy fear and love the great author of our being, not as an angry and avenging judge, but as a reconciled Father, as a moſt gracious Saviour, as the enlightener of our underſtandings, and the ſanctifier of our ſpirits; who, by this ſhort probation has nothing elſe in view than that when it is ended, we may be prepared to dwell with him for ever, "in joy "unſpeakable and full of glory." (1 Pet. i. 3.) In this our exile we mourn and are afflicted by reaſon of the loſs we have ſuſtained in and through the corruption of our nature, but we have many and ſtrong conſolations, in the practice of true piety and virtue. In human life, infirm as it is, are many pleaſures, many innocent gratifications and enjoyments, many natural and ſocial ties which delightfully engage the affections; many fond hopes and pleaſing expectations to beguile the time of our ſojourning here, and even on the verge of eternity—in the immediate approach of

death, when every earthly aid fails him, and all the comfort this world can give, forſakes him, the good man's proſpects darken not, but with the longing eye of faith and hope he ſees heaven opened to him; he beholds with rapture thoſe holy manſions of peace and reſt, of happineſs and joy, wherein dwelleth righteouſneſs, prepared to receive him, through the tender mercy and forgiveneſs of God, who hath wrought a far more important work than man's creation, that is to ſay, his REDEMPTION *by our Lord and Saviour* JESUS CHRIST.

Thus is God not only not blameable on account of the evil which hath crept into his works, but his glory ſhines brighter in the ſight of every creature than it would have done had no misfortune ever befallen mankind. He has magnified his juſtice and his mercy, and added to that of creation, another, and a much greater proof of his love and tender concern for his creatures, in willing at ſo high a price, as the ſacrifice of his Son, to redeem us from the pains and pe-

nalties of ſin; adopting at the ſame time ſuch effectual means for our ſalvation, that notwithſtanding the weakneſs of human nature, and the malice of its enemy the devil, millions of men, "*a great number, which no* "*man can number,*" (Rev. vii. 9.) ſhall join the hoſt of heaven—thoſe holy angels which kept their firſt eſtate, in praiſing their Creator and Redeemer, during the countleſs ages of eternity!

Should it now be queſtioned whether God concerns himſelf in our preſent ſtate of imperfection, where ſo many things ſeem wrong, it may be anſwered that he has viſibly interpoſed his Omnipotence in human affairs, as is ſufficiently proved by the various and undoubted miracles which have been wrought in the world. And though many lying wonders and falſe miracles have been done by the aid and aſſiſtance of evil ſpirits, yet they are eaſily detected and expoſed, and proved not to have proceeded immediately from God, their aim and end having been, not to *promote*, but to

oppoſe truth and goodneſs; and even theſe manifeſt a higher agency than any human power, and could only be done with the divine permiſſion to anſwer ſome important end. Of this kind were the miracles wrought by the magicians in Egypt, when they were ſuffered to withſtand Moſes and Aaron, who by overcoming them, proved in a more convincing way than they could have done, had they met with no ſuch oppoſition, that they alone had their commiſſion from heaven, and were the inſtruments of a higher power, than that by which their opponents were actuated. The miracles of Moſes and the prophets, of Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles, were ſo excellent in their nature, ſo ſubſtantial in their proof, ſo agreeable to the nature and attributes of God, ſo beneficial to the perſons on whom many of them were wrought, and altogether ſo holy in their end, that we may well ſay with the Jewiſh Doctor Nicodemus, "no man can do theſe miracles "except *God* be with him." (John iii. 2.) They could be done by no malignant being, their intention and effects were ſo good; nor

by any creature except through God's aſſiſtance, ſo great power was diſplayed in them.

In the ſure word of prophecy (which is alſo a kind of miracle) we have an additional proof of the divine interpoſition.—And though it may be granted, that in a great variety of predictions, a ſurpriſing coincidence or two might happen, and ſo a thing predicted might come to paſs apparently by mere chance; yet the events foretold by the prophets were ſo many in number, ſo diſtant in their accompliſhment, ſo circumſtantially related, ſo important and ſtrange that they could never have entered into the mind of any wiſe and ſober man, but by divine inſpiration, nor could they have been fulfilled exactly as they were deſcribed but by the immediate hand of God. The laws of nature were to be ſuperſeded and ſuſpended, eſpecially with regard to the Meſſiah; and all human wiſdom and ſtrength, all probability and rational conjecture were to be rendered vain and fooliſh in the eſtabliſhment and overthrow of mighty ſtates and empires. It might indeed hap-

pen that a thing probable in its nature, and likely from preſent circumſtances to take place at no very diſtant period, ſhould anſwer ſome prediction made reſpecting it without the gift of prophecy; but the prophecies we are ſpeaking of, relate to facts, ſome of which were many ages off, and which were ſo far from ſeeming probable, and within the reach of human wiſdom to foretel, that they were impoſſible in the common courſe of things, nor could their accompliſhment be effected by any earthly power. Thus had not the divine authority and inſpiration of the prophets been acknowledged, and their perſons held in great eſteem and reverence, on account of their wiſdom, their piety, and virtue, they muſt have been reckoned madmen. In whatever eſtimation however they might have been held by their contemporaries, time would have proved that their miſſion was from above, and poſterity had been obliged to confeſs " that prophecy came " not in old time by the will of man; but holy " men of God, ſpake as they were moved " by the Holy Ghoſt." (2 Pet. i. 21.)

Now, if for divers weighty and important purpoſes, God hath thus manifeſtly interpoſed with his wiſdom and power in the affairs of the world, what hinders but that he may, though in a leſs viſible and ſtriking manner, order all inferior events according to the counſel of his will? By the ſecret operations of his Holy Spirit, he may as far as is conſiſtent with the character of free, rational, and accountable creatures, diſpoſe of us, and ſo direct all ſublunary things, as to deduce the greateſt poſſible good, from theſe confuſed elements of good and evil.

But it is aſked, if God preſerve and govern every creature, whence thoſe phyſical and moral evils which make ſuch havoc and confuſion in the world? whence wars, famines, peſtilences, and plagues, inundations, and earthquakes, with many other deſtructive calamities which ſeem to regard no diſtinction, but to involve indiſcriminately in one common ruin, the good with the bad, the well with the ill-deſerving?

The general anſwer *is*, they ariſe from that imperfection which belongs to our nature as fallen creatures, and free, moral agents. All evil is in conſequence of original tranſgreſſion, and moral evils proceed from men's exorbitant paſſions and unlawful appetites, which manifeſt themſelves in acts of impiety towards God, in cruelty, injuſtice, and oppreſſion towards men; and when great deſpite is done to the Holy Spirit of grace, which is given to every man to profit withal, and diſorders, phyſical or moral, rage, and mightily prevail, they are marks of the immediate diſpleaſure of Almighty God, who hath given in his anger, the rein to corruption, for the correction and amendment of a guilty world. Hence many phyſical calamities—And hence war, a thing ſo cruel and unjuſt in its nature and origin, and to be deplored in its firſt conſequences by every good man, may yet be both lawful and beneficial, ſince God may, and will, ſuffer the ſword, as well as the famine, and the peſtilence, to execute his judgments in the earth, and to deſtroy, or elſe reclaim, thoſe wicked, and fooliſh

men, who dare to ſet at nought all his counſels, and who will hearken to none of his reproofs. And when it is ſaid, " all they " that take the ſword, ſhall periſh by the " ſword," (Matt. xxvi. 52.) it is meant eſpecially of the *unrighteous aggreſſor*, and cannot be applied in the ſame ſenſe to thoſe whom God has ſtirred up and armed in the defence of his religion and laws, and by conſequence, of public juſtice and humanity. Theſe acting in concert with, and in obedience to the will of Heaven, cannot be ſaid to take the ſword, but to have it forced into their hands, by a juſt and imperious (though dreadful) neceſſity; and though in all ſuch afflictions, many comparatively innocent perſons may ſuffer with the guilty, yet the former ſhall not periſh as the latter—theſe *only* ſhall periſh for ever. Death as the meer termination of a man's exiſtence here, cannot juſtly be conſidered as a mark of the divine diſpleaſure. It is a part of that puniſhment denounced againſt original ſin, which was never to be remitted, but always inflicting, until the laſt trumpet ſhall ſummon both the quick and the dead to appear

before the judgment ſeat of Chriſt. It is that diſmal debt of nature which all men owe, and which all muſt pay, and God is beſt able to determine for every one, how, and when, and where, this debt ſhall be diſcharged. Any reaſonable and conſiderate mind, reflecting on the infinite wiſdom, power, and goodneſs of God, will readily ſubmit this ſhort, painful, and uncertain life, to his diſpoſal who gave it, will argue on the aweful and important ſubject ſomething like the manner following. If piety, virtue, and goodneſs be ſhort-lived, they are taken from the evil to come, to enjoy their reward—that reſt in heaven, which they could not find on earth. If they live long, and ſee many good days, it is that God may be glorified in them, and men edified by their good works. If the wicked be cut off in the midſt of his years, he has filled up thus early the meaſure of his iniquity. If his life be prolonged, and the day of grace extended, it is in mercy, to the end he may repent, turn from the evil of his ways, and poſſibly be ſaved. If the pious Chriſtian be exerciſed with af-

fliction, it is becauſe trouble is good for him*; that his faith and patience may be tried, approved and ſuitably rewarded. If the ungodly ſeem to flouriſh in great proſperity, divine juſtice is not perverted becauſe its execution is delayed; if timely repentance and amendment do not take place, his end ſhall be that he periſh for ever.

As to any apparent indiſcrimination or injuſtice in the judgements of heaven, it is never pretended that every virtue has here its full reward; though if we affirm that no virtue is altogether deſtitute of ſome preſent recompence, nor any vice without a temporal puniſhment, we ſhall not contradict perhaps the general experience and obſervation of mankind. But as this is not our ultimate abode, it cannot be abſolutely a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, and it ſhould be remembered, that ſtrictly ſpeaking all men are guilty in the ſight of God, and deſerve correction at his hands. "There is none that doeth good, no

* It is good for me that I have been in trouble, &c. Pſ. cxix. 17.

" not one." Pſ. xiv. 3. Even our bleſſed Saviour himſelf, regarding his manhood, diſclaims the appellation good maſter: " why calleſt thou *me* good? there is none " good but *one*, that is *God*." (Matt. xix. 16. 17.) On the authority therefore of the ſacred ſcriptures, and appealing at the ſame time, as we do, to the teſtimony of conſcience, that faithful witneſs and monitor in the breaſt of every man, we affirm, and we hazardn o contradiction, that he is not living, who can juſtly and truly ſay, I am clean; I am innocent; I am free from all tranſgreſſion. " How " ſhall he be clean that is born of a woman?" (Job xxv. 4.) " Cleanſe thou me from " my ſecret faults." (Pſ. xix. 12.)

God then cannot ſtrike an innocent perſon ſince all are thus guilty; but as there are different ſhades of guilt, whatever piety and goodneſs may be diſcernable by the all-ſeeing eye of heaven among the multitudes which ſuffer in any publick calamity, he both can and will juſtly compenſate them hereafter. We have therefore only to admit that there is a future ſtate of rewards and

puniſhments, and we may be aſſured that all the divine diſpenſations are moſt juſt, and wiſe and good. And to help us to attain this pious, humble diſpoſition of mind, which is the only ſure foundation of all virtue and happineſs here below, we ſhould conſider how very ill-qualified we are to criticize on the juſtice and expediency of the various acts of divine Providence, whether theſe acts are judgements or mercies. So ignorant and blind are we with regard to ourſelves, that we cannot ſearch out, nor number even our own tranſgreſſions*, and ſo exactly weigh our actions in the balance of the ſanctuary as to aſcertain their juſt deſert; only this we know and are certain of, that were God extreme to mark what is done amiſs, no fleſh could abide his preſence. Of others, ſo little can we diſcern and judge aright, that the character which appears to the world in the ſplendid robes of righteouſneſs, cloathed in piety and virtue, in humility, juſtice, and charity, may poſſibly ſtand convicted, a loath-

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ſome ſpectacle, before the aweful preſence of God and his holy angels, in the thread-bare cloak of hypocriſy, under which are oftentimes concealed, pride and vanity, fraud and ſelfiſhneſs. To his own maſter then let every man (as indeed he muſt) ſtand or fall. He whoſe all-ſeeing eye can penetrate the inmoſt receſſes of the heart, who knoweth and ſearcheth out the ſpirits of all men, "who underſtandeth "our thoughts afar off*", can only tell what is at all times, in all places, towards all perſons, juſt, and right, and beſt to do. God alone cannot err, and although we ſhort-ſighted mortals may be ſometimes at a loſs to know why he dealeth thus or thus with the children of men: although his ways may ſeem to us, puzzled with mazes, and perplexed with errors, ſtill we may be ſure they will lead all who in faith and patience confide in him, to that happy place, where there ſhall be no more death, nor ſorrow, nor pain, but where is "fulneſs of joy, and rivers of pleaſure flowing

* Pſ. cxxxix. 2.

" for evermore." (Pſ. xvi. 11.) The end propoſed may be at too great a diſtance for us to diſcern, and the means too complicated to be accurately diſtinguiſhed: their connexion with, and influence on each other, may be too minute and nice to be traced by us through all their windings and changes; and yet, unerring wiſdom, and infinite goodneſs may direct every ſtep, and happineſs be the reſult of all. God may carry thoſe who, in humble dependance, commit themſelves to his guidance, as he did the children of Iſrael for forty years together through the ſcorching ſands of the deſert; ſtill he will conduct them to the land of promiſe, where at reſt from all their labors, they ſhall admire and praiſe, in unſpeakable delight, the divine wiſdom, power, and goodneſs, which ſupported, and conducted them in ſafety, to the end of ſo long, ſo painful, and dangerous a journey. On the troubled ocean of life their little bark may be toſſed to and fro by the winds and the waves: it may be ſhattered by the ſtorms, and impaired by the length of the voyage, yet God being the pilot

in whoſe ſkill they cónfide, he will bring them to the haven wherein they ſhould be.

But the unequal diſtribution of thoſe things which are commonly eſteemed good and evil, as poverty and riches, proſperity and adverſity, &c. has always been a great and general objection to divine Providence.

Were this our ultimate abode, God might, perhaps, ſometimes, appear to be partial, and ſeem to afflict the children of men in vain; but it is a ſtate of trial only, and of preparation for a future life of endleſs duration; and that infinite variety of rank and condition in the world which outwardly diſtinguiſhes one man ſo much from another, as it depends not on the will of man, ſo neither is it altogether the appointment of God, though he permits it. It ariſes, in the firſt inſtance, neceſſarily out of the condition of our being as fallen and imperfect creatures. But though all the circumſtances of this life, are not abſolutely of divine appointment, nor the far greater number of them, any certain proofs of

God's favor or diſpleaſure, being things perfectly indifferent in his eſtimation; yet as they are not ſo with us, but we are all differently, and more or leſs affected by them, they are oftentimes uſed by him to try the temper and diſpoſition, and to improve the virtue of all his rational creatures; and he diſpoſes of the riches, the honors and powers of the world, with the moſt abſolute ſovereignty. The rich are tried with their riches, the poor with their poverty, the proſperous are tried with proſperity, the afflicted with adverſity, and that without any uniformity, on the part of the great diſpoſer of all things, but by ſuch an infinite variety of changes, compoſed of fortunate and unfortunate, of proſperous and adverſe, of afflicting and conſoling circumſtances, as may ſeem to him moſt juſt and good, and beſt calculated to promote the great and gracious ends of his government. So the man, who to-day, is giddily ſwimming with the ſtreams of pleaſure, ſhall, before to-morrow's ſun goes down, be overwhelmed in ſorrow: he who is now raiſed

high on the pinnacle of power, ſhall anon be brought low, even to the ground: he who is eſteemed, and held in honor, ſhall preſently be deſpiſed, and treated as a ſlave: he, who like Aman (Apoc. b. Eſther chap. vi.) in the inſolence of pride and greatneſs contrives the ruin of the innocent, ſhall himſelf fall into the pit which he hath digged: he who, like holy Job, is the richeſt, the happieſt, and the beſt of men, ſhall, if God ſee it neceſſary to prove him in the furnace of affliction, that his virtue may appear like gold tried ſeven times in the fire, ſoon experience a ſad reverſe of fortune, and mourn over his poverty and wretchedneſs, ſitting in ſackcloth and aſhes. Things of this nature ever have been, and now are, ſo remarkable in the world, that we cannot help ſeeing the hand of God in them, and knowing that nothing is ſo certain in theſe uncertain things, as that the Almighty, by all the viciſſitudes of life men are often made to experience, and all the ſudden and unlooked for changes of for-

tune in kingdoms and individuals, is making his power to be felt in all the earth, and with the moſt ſovereign and irreſiſtible ſway, " is cauſing all things to work " together for good, to them that love " him." (Rom. viii. 28.)

Laſtly; Should it be imagined that the impious and prophane, are the only proſperous and happy: that the pious and virtuous alone, are here the miſerable and poor; and that this ſuffering ſtate of virtue in the world, is an unanſwerable objection to the wiſdom and goodneſs of a divine ſuperintending Providence; it may be anſwered, that appearances are fallacious, and that we are therefore, when judging from them alone, generally miſtaken.

It cannot, it need not however be denied, that virtue is here in a ſuffering ſtate. Many virtues, and thoſe the moſt eſtimable in the ſight of God, can no otherwiſe ſubſiſt than in the ſtruggle of

reaſon ſanctified and aided by religion againſt paſſion and falſe notions of ſelf-intereſt. Such, for inſtance, are humility and temperance in proſperity: patience and reſignation to the will of God in affliction: induſtry, frugality, and contentedneſs in poverty and a low condition: returning good for evil: forgiving of injuries; and a peaceable ſubmiſſion to thoſe who who are in authority, even to the froward, for God and conſcience ſake. Frequent occaſion is given for the exerciſe of each, and of all theſe virtues; and it is to the ſincere practice of them chiefly, that through Chriſt a reward is promiſed to believers in the kingdom of heaven. Now it is evident that in this ſtate of things, men cannot practiſe the ſuffering virtues, and moſt virtues are ſuch, and at the ſame time enjoy any other recompence than that internal ſatisfaction which continually ariſes in the mind, conſcious of the approbation and favor of God, and of having done its duty to the beſt of its knowledge and ability. And the afflicted will have little reaſon to complain when this life is ended,

if their troubles gave occaſion to, exerciſed, and improved, thoſe graces and virtues, which were neceſſary to fit the ſoul for its reward in eternal felicity. If time and eternity are weighed againſt each other, the former, with all its circumſtances of weight and importance, will be found lighter than a feather, and the latter to outweigh every poſſible conſideration. Time does not bear ſo near a proportion to eternity as a drop of water does to the ocean, or as a grain of ſand to the mountains of it on the ſea ſhore. Between time and eternity there is no proportion, but when millions of ages ſhall have paſſed away, eternity will ſtill be the ſame as though it were but beginning! Therefore the Apoſtle argues well in his viiith chap. to the Rom. and at the 18th v. where he ſays, "I reckon "that the ſufferings of this preſent time, "are not worthy to be compared with "the glory which ſhall be revealed in us."

In the eye both of reaſon and religion then, our condition here, be it high or low, rich

or poor, and the number of our days, be they many or few, are objects but of ſmall importance, only as they ſerve to that future exiſtence which awaits all men, when the good ſhall be for ever happy in Chriſt, and the bad for ever miſerable out of him. The time of our ſojourning here being very ſhort, and this ſhort time chequered with ſo many ills in conſequence of ſin original and actual, it is as weak as it is wicked to cavil with the diſpenſations of Providence, ſeeing happineſs depends not on the accidents of birth, or rank, or fortune in the world, but on the practice of piety and virtue, in the cottager and the king. Contentment is the fair and lovely offspring of a pious truſt in God's good Providence, in all well-doing, according to the Goſpel of Chriſt, and can make us happy (as far as mortals can be happy) in any condition however humble: and without ſuch a truſt, however rich and great, men are, they muſt be miſerable, at leaſt, they have no foundation in nature, reaſon, or religion, for being otherwiſe. And here is the only equality that can ſubſiſt among men. All may

be equally pious, ſober, induſtrious, honeſt, and virtuous, and then all will be equally content and happy: equally ſecure of the favor of God here, and of an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and which fadeth not way, in the kingdom of heaven hereafter. In a word, admitting that there is a God, which none but a fool will deny*, and a future life which ſome may affect and wiſh to diſbelieve, but cannot diſprove; it is the eaſieſt thing imaginable to vindicate divine Providence in all thoſe matters which ſome men ſo grievouſly complain of, and err about, fooliſhly charging God with injuſtice or neglect, and alledging that all things are the effect of chance:—fortuna certa, aut incerta natura.

Praying the great Diſpoſer of events to give his bleſſing on all our endeavours (however feeble) to promote his glory, and to ſet forward the ſalvation of men, we will remark here (what may have been gathered from the preceding pages,) that it is not from

* The fool hath ſaid in his heart there is no God. Pſ. xiv. 1.

" ſeeming evil" *only*, that God " educes " good"*, but from poſitive and ſubſtantial evil: from all the dreadful conſequences of the fall of our firſt parents in Paradiſe: from all the ſinful deeds which men as fallen creatures, and free moral agents will do when unregenerate, that is, when not ſubmitting themſelves to the wholeſome reſtraints of the Goſpel of Chriſt, nor embracing the means of grace and ſalvation which are provided therein, and ordained by God for the reſtoration of mankind to his favor, to holineſs, and happineſs. God governs the world, but he leaves to men that freedom of thinking, and judging, and acting, which renders them highly reſponſible to him for their conduct. He rules like an abſolute ſovereign, yet not as an arbitrary tyrant, but as a juſt and merciful Judge. The gracious Creator, and tender Father of all, never interpoſes with the authority of his power, or the ſeverity of his juſtice, but to promote the well-being of

* Thomſon's Hymn annexed to his Seaſons.

mankind at large. By his mercies firſt, and by his judgments next, he comforts and afflicts, he wounds, and heals, and by all poſſible means, conſiſtent with a free and beneficent government, he endeavours to recover ſuch as are loſt. And therefore if men repent not, neither turn from the evil of their ways: if his promiſes and threatenings produce no good effect, no wonder if he brings upon the impenitent wicked, ſwift deſtruction: no wonder if he viſit them in his heavy diſpleaſure with his four ſore judgments, the *ſword*, and the *famine*, and the *noiſome beaſt*, and the *peſtilence*. As we read in the prophet Ezech. xiv. 21. "When a land ſinneth by treſpaſſing grievouſly, then God will ſtretch out his hand upon it, and will break the ſtaff of the bread thereof, and will ſend famine upon it, and will cut off man and beaſt from it. Though theſe three men Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they ſhould deliver but their own ſouls by their righteouſneſs, ſaith the Lord God. They ſhould deliver neither ſons nor daughters by their righteouſneſs; they only ſhould

be delivered themſelves. The righteouſneſs of the righteous ſhall deliver him, and the wickedneſs of the wicked ſhall deſtroy him." Every where God is thus pleaſed to repreſent himſelf in the holy ſcriptures, as a God, juſt as well as merciful; terrible to his enemies, and gracious to them that love and fear him, to the end that all nations ſhould bow themſelves before him, ſerve, honor, and obey him, according to the goſpel of his SON JESUS CHRIST, OUR SAVIOUR AND REDEEMER, in whom, and by whom, he has given to the world, every bleſſing that can contribute to preſent happineſs and future glory. Amen.

THE END.